



Surgery and Diagnostic Backlog

PROGRESS REPORT

October 14, 2021



Executive Summary

Progress on Addressing Surgical and Diagnostic Backlog

In June, Doctors Manitoba released a report on the massive backlog of surgical and diagnostic procedures. Four months later, this report provides an updated estimate on the backlog and identifies progress on catching up.

Updated Estimate – Backlog has Increased

The third wave caused more disruptions to surgeries and diagnostic tests, which continued over the summer even as cases dropped and restrictions eased.

We estimate the backlog has grown to nearly 130,000 surgical and diagnostic procedures, up from 110,000 in June. This includes:

- **Over 52,000 surgical procedures, up from 39,000;**
- **Over 41,000 diagnostic imaging tests, down from 44,000; and**
- **Over 35,000 other procedures, including endoscopies, allergy tests and mammograms, up from 32,000.**

Physicians report that patients continue to wait longer in pain and discomfort. Minor health issues are becoming more complex requiring longer procedures. Patient harm continues to occur, especially as surgeries and diagnostics for cancer and cardiac continue to be affected.

Progress on Recovery Plan Recommendations

In June, we released three recommendations for the province and health leaders, intended to address the backlog in full.

So far, there has been preliminary progress on one recommendation, but there is no visible progress on the other two.

Doctors remain willing to take on additional patient volumes to help address the backlog, but they are concerned about the lack of planning and progress to address the backlog.

As Manitoba enters a fourth wave, further disruptions are expected and the backlog is expected to grow.

Monitoring the Growing Backlog



Estimating the Pandemic Surgery Backlog



**Estimated
Surgery Backlog:
52,000
CASES
and counting**

***The estimated backlog
has grown 33%,
from 39,000 in May***

To estimate the full size of the surgery backlog generated during the pandemic, we considered several factors:

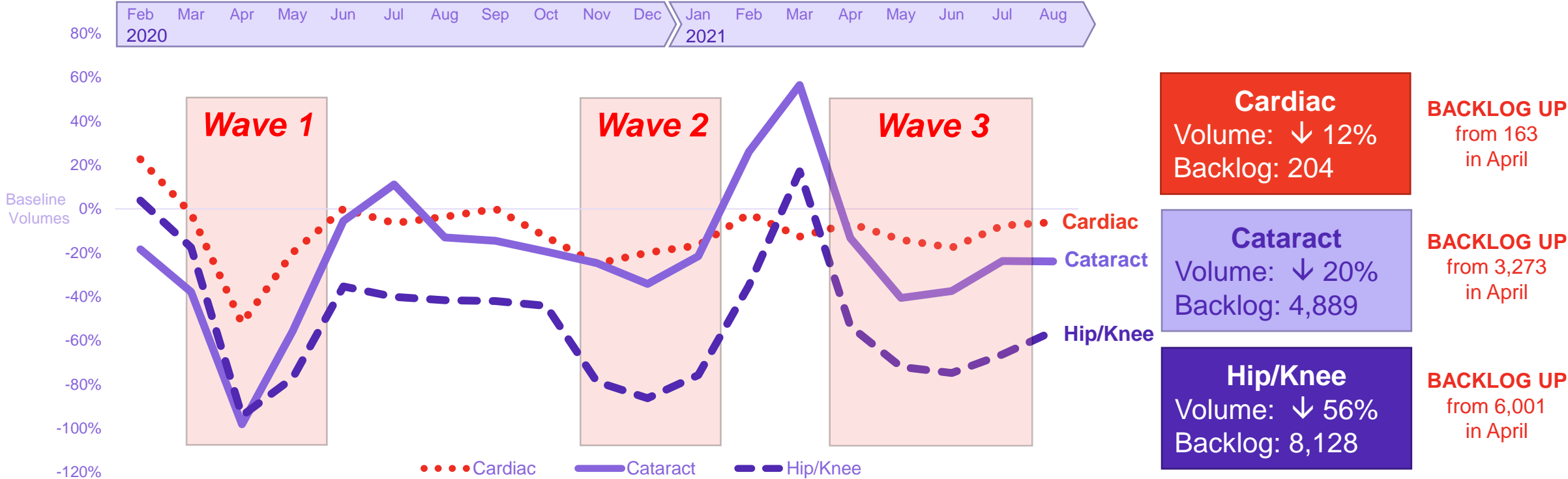
- Shared Health’s [public statement in July 2021](#) that the backlog had reached 30,000 cases, not counting procedures that had not been scheduled.
- CIHI’s [comprehensive reporting on surgery volumes](#) changes during the first and second waves, which found a 22% decrease in surgical volumes (18,398 cases) in Manitoba between March and December, 2020.
- Manitoba Health’s [monthly public reporting](#) of cataract, hip/knee and cardiac procedure volumes (down 32%).
- Earlier estimates from surgeons suggested a 40% decrease in volumes. Referring physicians’ estimates suggested referrals decreased by 11%. The decrease in referrals reveals a potential “hidden” backlog not captured elsewhere, which we have incorporated into our estimate.

Pandemic backlog estimate covers March 2020 to September 2021.



Surgery Backlog for Cataract, Hip/Knee & Cardiac

For all three publicly-reported priority surgeries, the backlog has increased since our initial report. While some progress was made between the second and third waves on reducing the backlog for cataract and hip/knee procedures, the disruption during the third wave erased that progress and added the backlog.



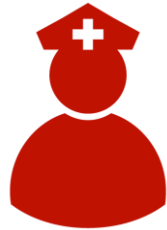
% change in surgery volume compared to same month from pre-pandemic period 2019/2020
Source: Manitoba Health

Surgery Backlog Caused by More Than COVID-19

Based on feedback from surgeons, we have identified that the prolonged disruption to surgical volumes in Manitoba has several causes, which are also making it difficult to recover:



**Surges in COVID-19
admissions to hospital**



**Shortage of nurses and
lack of OR technologists**



**Lack of redundancy
in hospital system**

Manitoba Experiences Largest Impact

During the first wave in the spring of 2020, all provinces paused many surgical procedures, largely as a precautionary measure to free up hospital capacity for a potential surge in COVID-19 admissions.


During the second wave, however, Manitoba was the only province that experienced a significant decrease in surgical volumes. For the period of October to December 2020, there was a 29% decrease in surgical volumes in Manitoba, compared to just an average 4% decrease across Canada.

Source: [Canadian Institute for Health Information](#)

Change in Surgical Volumes (2020 vs 2019)

Province	1 st Wave (Mar-May)	2 nd Wave (Oct-Dec)
Newfoundland & Labrador	-64%	0%
Prince Edward Island	-44%	7%
Nova Scotia	-59%	-1%
New Brunswick	-52%	-7%
Ontario	-60%	-4%
Manitoba	-45%	-29%
Saskatchewan	-54%	-7%
Alberta	-47%	-2%
British Columbia	-49%	-1%
Overall Total	-55%	-4%

Estimating the Diagnostic Pandemic Backlog



**Estimated
Diagnostic
Testing Backlog:**
**41,584
Tests**

*The backlog has improved
6% from 44,300 in April*

The diagnostic imaging backlog is much easier to calculate as volumes are reported publicly on a monthly basis by Manitoba Health.

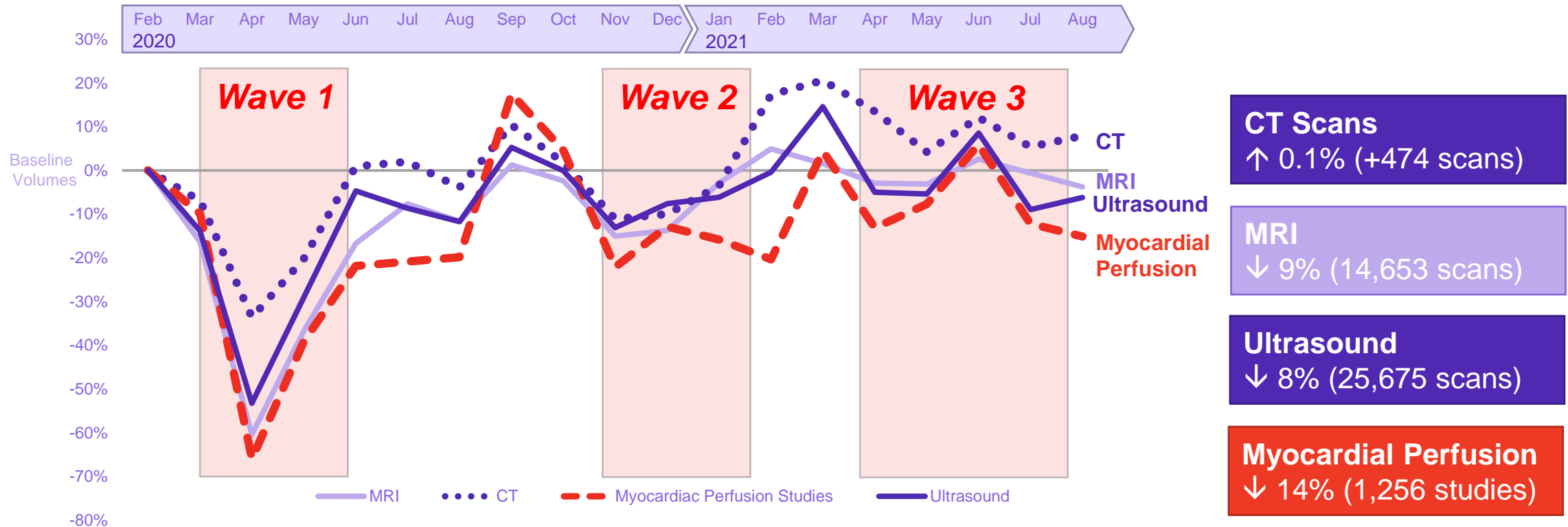
Progress has been made on CT Scans, with the backlog now eliminated. However, the backlog for other imaging tests has continued to grow:

Test	April Backlog	August Backlog	Backlog Status
CT Scan	5,472	0	✓ Eliminated
Ultrasound	23,484	25,675	! Increased
MRI Scan	14,234	14,653	! Increased
Myocardial Perfusion Test	1,116	1,256	! Increased

Pandemic backlog estimate covers March 2020 to August 2021.

Diagnostic Volume Changes

Diagnostic imaging was able to avoid major disruptions during the third wave of the pandemic, as staff were less likely to be redeployed to other settings such as critical care. The backlog of CT scans has now been fully addressed thanks to added volumes that began after wave two and were sustained through wave three. The backlog of MRI, Ultrasound and Myocardial Perfusion tests, however, grew moderately since our last report.



% change in diagnostic imaging volume compared to same month from pre-pandemic period 2019/2020

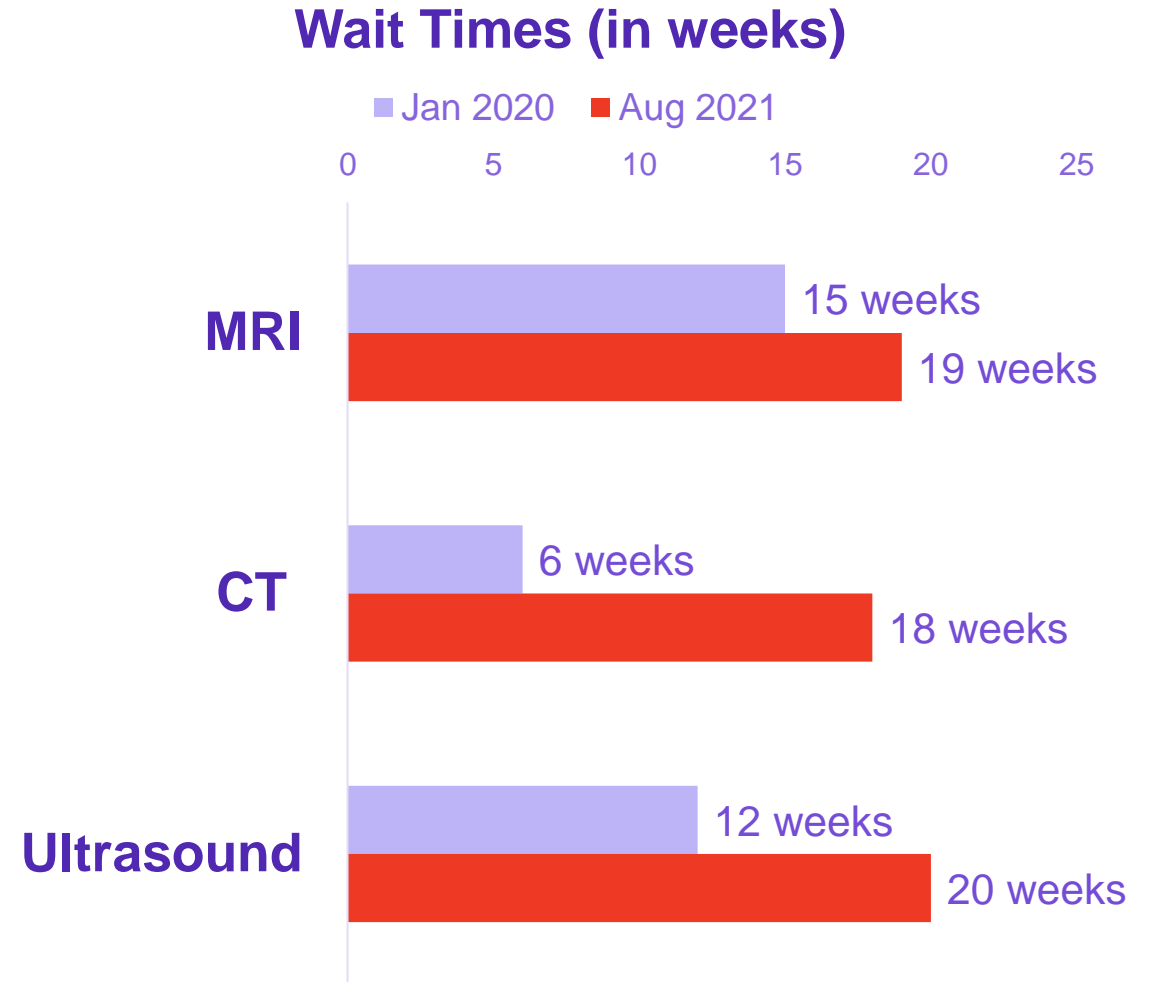
Source: Manitoba Health

Longer Wait Times for Diagnostic Tests

Because wait time information is reported monthly for diagnostic imaging, we can compare how wait times have changed.

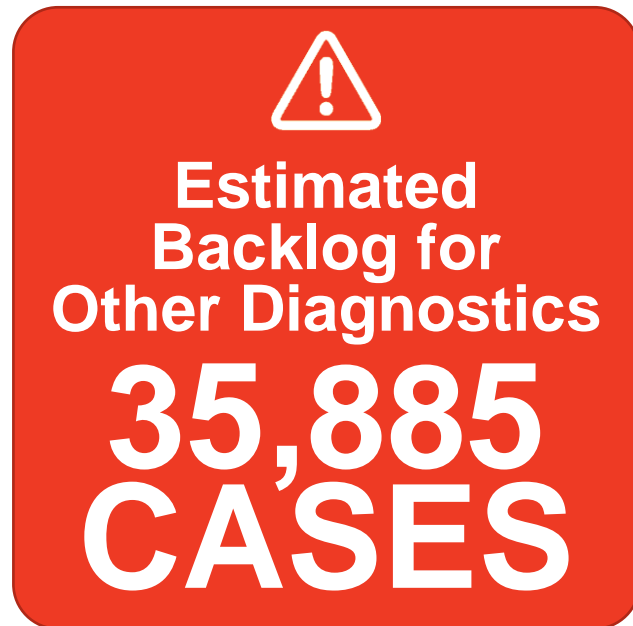
This reveals a concerning trend: wait times for diagnostic imaging tests are longer than before the pandemic.

For CT scans, the wait time is three times as long. This is particularly troubling as the health system has “caught up” on the volume of CT scans that would normally have occurred during the pandemic.



Source: Manitoba Health

Pandemic Backlog for Other Procedures



***The estimated backlog
has grown 10%,
from 32,591 in May***

There are several other diagnostics that have been impacted. The following estimates were developed based on issues identified by physicians.

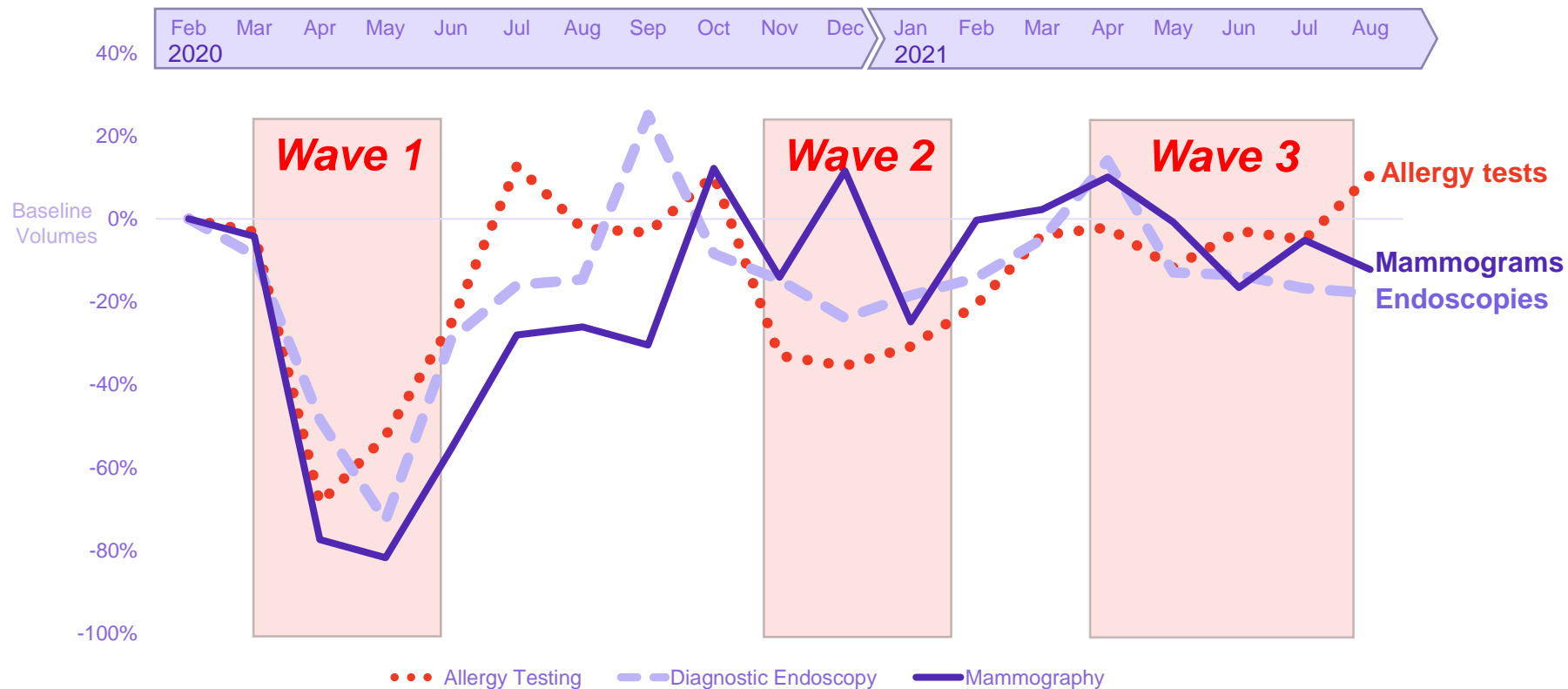
The backlog in all three areas has increased since May.

Test	April Backlog	August Backlog	Backlog Status
Allergy Tests	1,889	2,083	! Increased
Endoscopies	10,200	10,700	! Increased
Mammograms	20,502	23,102	! Increased

*Pandemic backlog estimate covers March 2020 to August 2021.
There may be additional wait lists from before the pandemic.*

Other Procedures Volume Changes

Other diagnostics, including mammograms, diagnostic endoscopies and allergy tests, saw sharp decreases in volume during the first wave. These tests were disrupted again by second and third waves, but not to the same extent.



Mammograms
↓ 14% (23,102 scans)

**Endoscopies
(Diagnostic only)**
↓ 12% (7,334 scopes)

Allergy Tests
↓ 10% (2,083 tests)

% change in diagnostic volumes compared to same month from pre-pandemic period 2019/2020

Source: Doctors Manitoba review of physician claims data. NOTE: Endoscopies includes diagnostic procedures only, and does not capture the full backlog.

Progress on Addressing Backlog



Progress on Recommendations

In our original report, we made three recommendations to support the immediate and sustained work needed to tackle the backlog. Below we summarize the progress made so far.

**NOT
STARTED**

① Provincial commitment to fully address backlog by fixed date

While government representatives have met with physicians and share our concern about the backlog, we have not yet seen a clear public commitment to fully address the backlog by a specific date.

**PRELIMINARY
STEPS TAKEN**

② Create Task Force to oversee surgery and diagnostic recovery

No task force has been created to provide the urgent and sustained oversight needed to address the backlog. Doctors Manitoba was asked by provincial officials to recommend physicians for an advisory group, but we are not aware that any meetings have been convened.

**NOT
STARTED**

③ Monthly public reporting

Monthly reporting on the size of the backlog and progress to address it has not started. The province continues to post monthly wait time and volume data for limited surgery and diagnostic procedures.

Slow Progress. Missed Opportunity.

When we released our report in June 2021, the third wave had peaked. We had hoped that work would begin immediately to start addressing the backlog.

In the days and weeks that followed, Doctors Manitoba welcomed the opportunity to discuss this issue with government leaders, including acting Health Minister Kelvin Goertzen, former Health Minister Heather Stefanson, and current Health Minister Audrey Gordon.

All of these government officials, along with senior health system leaders, shared our profound concern about the massive backlog and its impact on patients.

Over the summer, however, there has been little concrete progress to address the backlog.

The pandemic backlog of CT scans has been fully eliminated, though the wait time is still triple what it was before the pandemic. In all other areas, the backlog has grown.

The window of opportunity between the third and fourth pandemic waves has been lost, and there is a significant risk that surgeries will be further disrupted in the weeks ahead.

Doctors remain concerned, and they remain willing to increase their workload to eliminate backlog in all areas.